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## A CRY OF HUMAN DISTRESS.

A Song of Sorrow and Sadness. 'The Song of the Shirt.'

"Oh! men with sisters dear! Oh! men with mothers and wives! It is not linen you are wearing out, but human creatures' lives. Stitch, stitch, stitch, in poverty, hunger and dirt; sewing at once with a double thread a shroud as well as a shirt!" Over forty years ago we buried in 'a London cemetery, a true poet of the people. Suddenly and swiftly, by his sensitive art, he touched the heart of a sympathizing nation, so over Thomas Hood's grave in Kensal Green was erected a monument with this simple inscription: "He Sang the Song of the Shirt." But this was not all. Scored deep on the marble of the monument and over the above line was carved a legend more abiding still and of higher significance than any words: a woman's heart pierced with a needle, from which sad drops of blood fell upon the cold white stone. Nearly half a century has passed away since then, and on all sides are the signs of abounding prosperity and abiding peace. A bloodless victory has but now been obtained by a legal combination in aid of the overdriven and oppressed. Justice and sympathy have gained a triumph at our docks such as, perhaps, the world's commercial history has never known before, an earnest of better things to come. Yet, in spite of the experience of forty years, with its attendant blessings and noble toleration, there are thousands and tens of thousands of women in our midst, patient women, lonely women reduced to poverty, from no fault of their own, left by the wayside wounded after the struggle, gazed at with pity by the stranger; defenseless, hopeless women, whose heart the needle still pierces, and whose life-blood still drops daily on the irresponsible stone. Nay, it were truth to say that the condition of the patient, neglected, uncomplaining seamstresses is infinitely worse than when the poet sang his song of sorrow and touched a people's heart. When before in the world's history has the increase of the population of a mighty nation told with such merciless effect upon the women who work? When before have these forlorn creatures by the exigencies of civilization been so hunted for house-room that they find themselves compelled to pay 50 and 60 per cent. of their earnings for a roof to shelter them, and to share three parts of their crust with their landlords? Political economists insist, with unerring truth, that no sane man should spend more than a tenth of his income in house-rent; but the slave of the shirt week after week gives one shilling and nine pence out of an earned half-crown for her desolate room, and has to sacrifice for this necessity the dry bread

that sustains her and the scrap of fire that warms her chilled feet and her aching bones.

This daily destitution, this grim battle of starvation, has in it the very tragedy of truth. It is true now, as it was true when the poet sang, that to these wretched and forlorn creatures there comes no consoling voice of nature, no cry of human companionship. Then, as now, they never saw a green field, and were "twitted" with the joy of spring by the sunny backs of the brooding swallows. Then, as now, bread was dear and flesh and blood deplorably cheap, and the salt tears of the toiler hindered needle and thread. But never before in the history of the world has the condition of these poor creatures been so appalling, never before has their patient heroism been so triumphant. We speak not of those who have tasted the sweets of life and are now draining to the dreg its cup of bitterness, not of those who have made imprudent marriages and who, to adopt a familiar and heartless phrase, "have flown in the face of Providence," not of those whose misfortune has a cause or whose sins are being bitterly avenged, but of the women who are left desolate and are thrust into the ranks of the disconsolate; of widows whose mourning for their companions is rudely awakened by the abject terror and dire necessity of self-support; of companionless and spotless women who, surrounded by the wreckage of their old home, haunted with the ghost of past memories, fight for their very life, and ward off with heroic courage the awful alternate of despair or death. We have in our midst noble, self-sacrificing and unselfish men and women, who, leaving home and its comforts, devote themselves to the service of God and His poor; who, blessed with the good things of this life, take vows of poverty and abstinence, following with humanity and patience the thorny path that they have voluntarily chosen. For such, we cannot doubt, their reward will be great. These forlorn creatures, however, whose cause we plead have no option or election. Picture, if it be possible, the heart-rending misery of these loveless lives; conceive the dull agony of such a hopeless existence. Every hour they live must be one black purgatory of apprehension; the terror of the brief night can only be succeeded by the dull pain of never-ending day. Saturday will come round and the landlord must be paid, or away at one fell swoop go all the treasures that link the past and present. As hour succeeds hour, and the clock strikes, so much more of the appalling task must be completed or the bitter pangs of hunger will ensue and the faithful needle will drop from the patient finger, with a result too hideous to contemplate. When the weary, toiling

hours are over, the back aching with the task, the eyes swimming, the nervous system prostrated, there is still no rest for the defenseless creatures. Away they must go to the supervisor, and as the keen detecting eye passes over the work the woman knows that the bread which alone sustains her depends upon the momentous issue. On these daily rounds, in these grim battles for existence, forward with the untouched remnants, backward with the completed work, think of the pain each wandering woman must endure. She passes the mansions of the rich, she is brought face to face with evidence of waste and extravagance, she touches the elbows of pleasure, and her ears are assailed with the joyous cry of reckless gaiety. As she glides through the unheeding crowd with her burden in her hand, sick at heart, apprehensive, weary, she is well aware that if her position were known a thousand generous hands would be thrust into kindly pockets, and for one day at least sorrow should be hers no more. But by her that one word can never be spoken. The pride that has sustained her closes her appealing lips; so through this mart of wealth, through this gay avenue of enjoyment, dazzled with the lights and intoxicated with the loveliness of life, back she goes patiently, submissively, heroically to her crust of bread, her cup of cold water, her empty grate, to sleep away her sorrow on her lonely pillow, and to murmur her thanks to God that it is no worse.

And the remedy for this awful state of things? Over twenty years ago Mr. Ruskin, who had reprinted an extract from his journal detailing a case of death by starvation in the heart of the wealthiest city in the world, summed up the situation in these words: "I say you despise compassion: if you did not, such a newspaper paragraph would be as impossible in a Christian country as a deliberate assassination permitted in the public street." What might have been the truth then is certainly not approximate to the truth now. The public is not destitute of compassion or devoid of sympathy. The cry of distress is quick to penetrate the human heart, and no hearts are more quickly touched to deeds of compassion and mercy than those of our prosperous and unaffected countrymen. Whilst, however, this ghastly problem is being discussed, whilst politicians and philanthropists and economists and socialists are wrangling in our midst, it will not do for these miserable women to clothe us with their tears, and compel us to bear on our backs the daily burden of their sorrow. Our colonists cannot go forth to pioneer in garments gray with grief, nor can our little ones carry about them the record of this appalling truth. It will not do to take the high-handed line, and say that no man or woman is allowed to starve in this

country, or to point with merciless finger to the workhouse gates. "If we went into the workhouse," once pleaded a starving man, "we should die. When we come out in the summer we should be like people dropped from the sky. No one would know us, and we would not have even a room. I could work now if I had food, for my sight would get better." And so can the women work if they get food, and the women have inherited their hatred of public relief from the men. We make our charity either so insulting or so painful that they would rather die than take it at our hands. Nevertheless, they must not be thrust out of their cheerless rooms; nor can they be allowed to die neglected, unloved and alone. These wanderers have fallen by the way. This London of ours is teeming with wealth that is constantly poured out at the appeal of sweet-voiced charity. We have no lack in this world of wealth and poverty, of good Samaritans who bind up the wounds of the afflicted, and pour into the hands of the sorrowful both oil and wine; but alas! how many gaze blindly on, or, covering their faces, pass on the other side!—*London Daily Telegraph.*

As to the condition of the country in general the President says: "With in our own borders, a general condition of prosperity prevails. The harvests of the last summer were exceptionally abundant and the trade conditions now prevailing seem to promise a successful season to the merchant and the manufacturer and general employment to our working people."

Yes, the crops were generally good; but the prices of farm products are so low that there is no profit to farmers. This has not come about by reason of our having too many cattle or too many hogs or sheep or horses. There is demand for all we have, but the trouble lies in low prices and this is the effect of causes which the President ought to see clearly, though he does not. It comes from the tightening of monopoly's grasp. It began in combinations among railroad companies, bankers, commission merchants, packers and stock and money gamblers. The eyes of our public men will have to be opened.—*Kansas Farmer.*

The Kansas City Times is running a special newspaper train in Kansas over the Union Pacific. The Journal and Globe have like facilities on the Santa Fe, for their papers.

The Times is working up "re submission" and the others are "fornist." This is for the purpose of setting the people by the ears and as the sale of papers don't begin to pay the expense, it is just barely possible that it may open some of the blind eyes in this state to what is going on.—*Commoner.*